Current Issue - Winter 2005

table of contents
subscription
back issues
our publications

Winter 2005

Editor's Column
- Letter from the Editor

Features
- A Lasting Impression
- Trend Trackers
- Beyond the Ropes
- Everybody Wants to be a Cowboy

Departments
- Trade Secrets
- Meet + Eat
- Facility Focus
- Regional Spotlight
- Industry Update
- Premiere

[Show TOC teasers]

Recommended

Explore Minnesota Golf

My List

No entries

How to Use

Article

Trend Trackers

By Linda C. Chandler

Meeting professionals are often so busy they can't see the forest for the trees. To help you focus on the forest, Texas Meetings & Events talked to three individuals whose work involves tracking trends and anticipating the future. Here they share some insights on what changes and challenges the meetings industry in Texas can expect in the coming years.

Future Watch: Meetings

What's the one thing that will affect your business most in the future? Not the threat of terrorism, says futurist, trends expert and keynote speaker Jim Carroll of Toronto. Not an a offshore outsourcing. The one big thing is the rapid growth of knowledge.

According to Carroll, author of *Surviving the Information Age* (Prentice Hall Cana and *What I Learned From Frogs in Texas: Saving Your Skin With Forward-Think* (Oblio Press, Nov. 2004), the growth of knowledge and the accompanying rapid change are causing everything to become more complex.

"Posted on the wall of my office is this statement: 'Learning is what most adults living in the 21st century,'" says Carroll. "No one organization can do everything collaboration like never before. Meetings will be a key tool to help people learn a jobs better and they will reflect the alliances we have to create."

Technology will make some things easier but, as Carroll points out, planners can absorb all the complexities of Web content, A/V and other technical areas and m how to evaluate and choose experts to collaborate with. "Consider that digital ca technology changes every six months," he says. "Manufacturers need meetings keep the sales team up to date. The rapid pace of change can translate into a p of action for meeting planners. The sign of change I see in every arm of busines associations is the drive to become more competitive, more strategic in the face change."

Since 9/11, Carroll has observed what he calls "aggressive indecision" in the me industry—postponing, waiting to see what happens, booking speakers later, eve setting the meeting date and place but waiting to set content and send out broch issues are part of the 'new normal' and a change we have to adjust to," he says. decide to get aggressively involved in making decisions and looking to the future overboard in letting security issues scare us away."

Nor should higher security expenses rob meetings of content quality or entertain
Carroll maintains. "Virtual events may change the industry some, but they will ne
human relationships and the excitement opportunity afforded by face-to-face me
New approaches will be needed in many areas, he adds. More people are teleco
getting work done in different ways and demanding more work-life balance. That
decrease in weekend meetings. Generation Y workers are more diverse, change
often and seek more relevancy and challenge. They will expect more interactive
entertainment programming at meetings.
For meeting planners, key career skills will focus less on how well you do things
how you cope with and even create change, Carroll concludes. Some people wo
some won't know how, but those who are open to change will take risks, embrac
ideas and develop strategies to adapt to the fundamental shifts in knowledge, cu
business relationships.

Future Watch: Economy
State officials, including a pro-business governor, consider job creation, sales ta
prices, building permits, export figures and other factors to gauge Texas' econor
Businesses seeking to relocate to Texas consider the state's relatively low tax ra
schools, regulatory climate, skilled workforce and the quality of life in communiti
employees will live and work. From all perspectives, things are looking good in T
Tracye McDaniel, chief operating officer of the economic development and touris
the Office of the Governor.
While the rest of the country has seen a downturn in manufacturing jobs, Texas
seen stabilization in such jobs and expects a return to manufacturing job growth
"Toyota's plant in San Antonio was 2003's largest automotive deal in the country
McDaniel. "As Governor Rick Perry has noted, the impact will obviously be felt in
but also across the state, generating $300 million in sales tax revenue and franc
the next 25 years."
She also cites defense-related jobs in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, residential con
spurred by a booming population and low interest rates, energy recovery and so
turnaround. "From late 2003 to fall 2004, Texas netted 123,700 new jobs. We at
largest job creation project in the nation in the first quarter of 2004, with Vought A
decision to invest $598 billion in an aircraft manufacturing plant and create 3,000
its Dallas facility," says McDaniel.
In 2003, Texas created the $295 million Texas Enterprise Fund (TEF), a deal-clo
allows Texas to compete with other states in creating new jobs. By mid-August 2
had spent about $171.8 million in TEF grants to attract more than $6 billion in in
According to 2001 figures, the travel industry was the third leading export indust
2003, 81 percent of leisure trips originated within Texas, but nonresident travel is
faster than resident travel, increasing about 20 percent since 2001, notes McDa
nonresident travelers spend 20 percent more per day than residents."
Hotel occupancy rates and air travel statistics in Texas' largest cities are starting
Statewide, in the first half of 2004, room nights increased 5.2 percent; revenues
occupancy rates 2.3 percent, says McDaniel. During the tourism downturn, smal
charted higher occupancy rates than major metropolitan areas. "Smaller cities w
growing in the hotel industry and we see a general recovery across the board," s
Signature events, such as the Super Bowl, the Major League Baseball All-Star G
Houston and the Breeders' Cup in Grand Prairie, are important to building Texas
business, adds McDaniel. "These opportunities expose corporate CEOs and inte
visitors to the best of Texas' hospitality industry and introduce them to our favora
climate. The great myth of Texas—its pride, grit and entrepreneurial spirit—is sti
selling point."
Texas' strategic geographic location and large workforce are just as important a
McDaniel, Texas' economic growth is a public-private partnership. "Our schools
local governments, chambers of commerce and others must be involved. It takes
make it happen for the state."

Future Watch: Technology
"Cell phones, PDAs [and] 24/7 connectivity mean the work never stops. The bles
technology can overwhelm us and that's not a good thing!" says Jeffrey W. Rasc
Wimberley, Texas.
A surprising statement from someone known as a technology consultant, a princ
Partners and president of Attendee Management Inc., an interactive marketing,
housing company. But Rasco, a 20-year veteran of the industry, is also quick to

ways technology has improved the meeting planning process. "By far, the most change in the last five years has been online registration," he says. "It has totally previously tedious task and changed the way we do business."

PowerPoint on laptops replaced slide projectors, and Rasco predicts presentatic "make a giant leap forward" in the next few years as newer technologies with mo definition, audio and computer capabilities replace older ones in the meeting ind like high-definition is taking over home television.

The cyber café, another popular aspect of meetings and trade shows in the past apex. "As more people begin to use their cell phones and PDAs to get e-mail an Internet, there'll be fewer people standing in those lines and cyber cafés will go f phones," Rasco says.

While wireless networks are becoming available everywhere from convention ce hotels to fast food chains and coffee shops, Rasco questions the charges for wi application at meetings. "It makes no sense that I can get free access at the hot hotel wants to charge $10 a night for wireless in my room and maybe $1,500 a d in a meeting room," he observes. "They just don't get it."

Rasco expects the next revolutionary innovation to be radio frequency identificat inexpensive, adaptable chip, small enough to be in a nametag or wristband, will PDA or portal device, tracking when attendees enter and exit classrooms, confir continuing education credits and making lead retrieval simpler.

"The one technological innovation I expected to catch on but has not is meeting thought it would be ideally suited for corporations that hold hundreds of training same size and shape, but its lack of acceptance reaffirms that this is still a relati industry," says Rasco.

He cautions planners looking for technology solutions to avoid issuing RFPs aga procedures within the organization instead of doing the research and working wi vendors to acquire the solutions that will take meeting professionals into the futu "Technology is often ahead of how we used to do things. Be willing to change, a technology help take you where you need to go."

Linda C. Chandler is a freelance writer in Dallas, Texas.

Take Hold of Technology: Top 10 Reasons to do Online Event Registration
By Jeff Rasco

1. **Convenience**—for all stakeholders. Online registration is ready when you are

2. **Efficiency**—it saves time and money over tedious manual registration.

3. **Simplicity**—build a comprehensive conference site with sophisticated registra training.

4. **Ease of use**—registrants sign up, pay, are confirmed, even edit their informat place.

5. **Consolidation**—information on all meetings in a single database.

6. **Reporting**—use standard reports, or create what you need in seconds.

7. **Web-based**—all stakeholders can access needed information; all they need i Internet.

8. **Speed**—you're up and registering in a fraction of the time of paper systems.

9. **Response**—registrations begin to arrive in minutes instead of weeks.

10. **Accuracy**—no re-keying of information means there are fewer errors.

Visit www.attendeenet.com for more on online registration, or call Attendee Man at 866.759.8167.

Table Of Contents

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